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Why George Eliot was not a Political Activist

By June Skye Szirotny¹

Abstract

It is often thought that George Eliot's refusal to campaign actively for feminist goals indicates that she was no feminist. But there were several reasons that make the charge mute. She disliked dealing with practical matters, especially legislative ones. Proselytizing was particularly repugnant to her because she knew that her scandalous liaison with Lewes could only make her discussion of controversial matters a liability. Furthermore, she thought that the factors facilitating success were so complicated that one could say little that would be helpful to the aspiring woman. Actually, she thought of herself as an activist, "teaching the world through books." Thinking that she could more forcefully present her views by maintaining the persona of a neutral observer in her fiction, she objected to the role of political activist, who presents ideas in her own person. Finally, as a shy woman who cared only for her husband and her writing, who was often ill, and who hated publicity, she had neither the taste nor energy for public life.

Keywords: activist, legislative, suffrage, George Eliot

Unlike most of the first wave feminists whom we remember today, George Eliot was not a political activist for women's rights. While critics who do not question her feminism usually do not mention her nonactivism, as Kristin Brady says,¹ those who question her feminism frequently, implicitly or explicitly, put her nonactivism in the scale against her antifeminism.² Nancy Paxton writes, "Those who use political activism in the public sphere as a touchstone regard Eliot as a failed feminist."³ But George Eliot had reasons for her nonactivism, which were independent of her attitudes toward feminism.

In the first place, she disliked dealing with practical matters. Living "out of the political world,"⁴ "grievously" lacking "practical experience" (*Letters*, IV:473), as she wrote, and diffident about everything except a few moral matters, made clear to her by experience (*Letters*, IV:221), she, over and over, from 1857, protests that she is not knowledgeable enough to pronounce "on a question so entangled as the 'Woman Question'" (*Letters*, II:396). She is no "oracle," as she tells her feminist friend Clementia Taylor, in 1867 (*Letters*, IV:366). Hesitant to advise Elizabeth Malleon about establishing a college for working women, she explains, in 1869, "I am never confident in my own opinions positive or negative on practical matters" (*Letters*, VIII:460). Later that year, she writes Jane Senior that, except as regards education, she "feel[s] too deeply the difficult complications that beset every measure likely to affect the position of women . . . to give any practical adhesion to [such measures]" (*Letters*, V:58). Urged to speak for

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women's suffrage (*Letters*, IX:525, s.v. "Taylor, Mrs."), she writes Mrs. Taylor, in 1878:

My function is that of the *æsthetic*," not the doctrinal teacher--the rousing of the nobler emotions, which make mankind desire the social right, not the prescribing of special measures, concerning which the artistic mind, however strongly moved by social sympathy, is often not the best judge. It is one thing to feel keenly for one's fellow-beings; another to say, "This step, and this alone, will be the best to take for the removal of particular calamities" (*Letters*, VII:44).

Intellectual, contemplative, and diffident, preferring passivity to activity (*Letters*, II:383),⁵ she disliked embroiling herself in controversial issues, because she did not feel wise enough and because she disliked being forced to disagree with others.⁶ In 1877, writing to obtain another's help for a cause in which she is interested, she excuses herself because "I never intermeddle with practical efforts--associations, memorials & so forth."⁷

Legislative matters were among practical concerns that she particularly disparaged, as not providing meaningful reform. Having a "natural aversion to the machinery of society," she wrote, in 1860, that R. W. Emerson's essay "Man the Reformer," arguing that societal reformation comes through individual reformation, came to her "with fresh beauty and meaning" (*Letters*, I:99; III:337). Believing in "the wide-spreading roots of social and personal good," she condemned as nonsense, in 1877, "the supposition that a perfect government can arise or be sustained through any other means than the growing virtues of mankind" (*Letters*, VI:339, 338).⁸ Refusing to encourage political conversation at the Priory,⁹ she wrote D'Albert-Durade, in 1878, "I care as much or more for the interests of the people, but I believe less [than in 1849-50] in the help they will get from democrats" (*Letters*, VII:47).

Proselytizing was always distasteful to her. As one whose unconventional life,¹⁰ especially her liaison with a married man, led others to suppose she was a feminist, she was pressed by her friends to take part in the public debate on women's rights. But considered, according to her friend Anna Jameson, "very *free* in all her opinions as to morals and religion" (*Letters*, II:231), accused of taking a pseudonym because it was said that no book known to be written by her could succeed (*Letters*, III:103), and who visited Girton College, as a contemporary said, "*in cognita*, in order that the new experiment for women's welfare might not be associated even remotely with one, however important, whose social standing was anomalous,"¹¹ George Eliot knew that her proselytizing, would be a liability.¹² In 1868, she confesses to her friend Barbara Bodichon, "the originator of organized feminism in England,"¹³ who also trod carefully because of her unconventionality, that discussion of the Woman Question does not come well from her and that she never likes "to be quoted in any way on this subject" (*Letters*, IV:425). In 1867, she writes John Morley that she does not trust her impressions on the Woman Question, for "[t]he peculiarities of my own lot have caused me to have idiosyncrasies rather than average judgment" (*Letters*, VIII:402; cf. II:512). Benjamin Jowett wrote of her after her death, "There was a time when she greatly desired to write something for the good of women. But she thought that there were circumstances in her own life which unfitted her for this task."¹⁴

Furthermore, while second wave feminists criticized her as not encouraging women to become feminists, George Eliot thought such proselytizing futile. Conscious of the hard work, perseverance, possible poverty, courage, and renunciation of popular applause necessary to success¹⁵--of "the arduousness and difficulties of a career so facile in

imagination," which George Henry Lewes saw George Eliot emphasizing in *Daniel Deronda* (*Letters*, VI:193)--she had no advice for aspiring women except what she constantly told herself: work hard; constantly exert more effort.¹⁶ In *Daniel Deronda*, ch. xxiii, Klesmer's refusal to encourage Gwendolen to pursue a vocation has been criticized as George Eliot's unsympathetic view of the woman question,¹⁷ but she is only saying that Gwendolen's lack of interest in submitting to the discipline necessary to be a success guarantees her failure. To have given the fuller formula for George Eliot's own success--which, after excepting hard work, was: genius, pursuit of one of the few vocations that were accepted as proper to women, and the luck to have at her side one utterly devoted to her success¹⁸--could hardly have had much relevance for most of her feminine contemporaries. Feminists who think that Marian should have looked to herself for a model of the successful woman forget not only that she was blessed with some circumstances unusually propitious but also that she waited a long time for success, and that, when it came, she associated it with death.¹⁹

Moreover, she seems to have thought that success is so elusive (*Letters*, I:252; *Middlemarch*, ch. xxii, p. 215), and the factors that facilitate it so complicated, that one can say little about the process of securing success. In *Middlemarch*, she speaks of "the complicated probabilities of an arduous purpose, with all the possible thwartings, and furtherings of circumstance, all the niceties of inward balance, by which a man swims and makes his point or else is carried headlong" (ch. xv, 146; cf. ch. I, 485). Lydgate thinks that "the rare conjunctions of nature" that produce "something exceptional" "always depend on conditions that are not obvious" (ch. xvi, p. 158). "We know what a masquerade all development is, and what effective shapes may be disguised in helpless embryos. . . . Among all forms of mistake, prophecy is the most gratuitous" (*ibid.*, ch. x, p. 82). Saying that the only thing she would care to dwell on in an autobiography would be her despair that she would not be able to achieve anything, and "a knowledge of this might be a help to some other struggler," she added, "but, on the other hand, it might only lead to an increase of bad writing."²⁰

Thus, like Stendhal,²¹ she was not interested in encouraging every woman to pursue a vocation. Though, in 1856, admiring Frederika Bremer's advocacy of women's liberation, she objects to her enticing women, in *Hertha*, to pursue professions by presenting them, "in the pink haze of visions and romance" rather than "in the 'light of common day.'"

It can only tend to retard the admission that women may pursue [a career in medicine] with success, for a distinguished authoress to imply that they may be suitably prepared . . . by lectures on . . . a very nebulous thesis . . . , or to associate the attendance of women by the sick bed, not with the hard drudgery of real practice, but with the vicissitudes of a love-story. Women have not to prove that they can be emotional, and rhapsodic, and spiritualistic; every one believes that already.²²

While, in 1860, she expressed to Kate Field "great interest in all young girls who aspire to lead broader lives than those carved out by society,"²³ she, believing that "[f]ew are born to do the great work of the world,"²⁴ was an elitist, most interested in promoting talented persons like herself. But apparently she thought that these would succeed without outside help. "[W]ith every obstacle against her--sex and health and convention"--as Virginia Woolf describes her,²⁵ believing that she had succeeded solely by merit, but forgetting Lewes's incomparable devotion (she would tell other aspirants that

recommendations are not the door to publication [*Letters*, VII:177-78; VIII:251]), she may have thought that women do not usually fail through lack of opportunity. In "Silly Novels," she was more impressed with the fact that incompetent women were pursuing careers than with the fact that women were locked out of them. In 1849, she had written, "Opportunity is kind" (*Letters*, I:277). To those capable of doing "the great work of the world," "the field of usefulness will constantly widen," she thought,²⁶ though late in life she admitted, as Edith Simcox says, "that there might be cases--though infrequently--of people to whom opportunities do not come."²⁷ She argues that the inferior physiology of the grand Teutonic woman,²⁸ "more than unfavourable external circumstances," explains why women's intellectual contributions have been meager.²⁹ Perhaps, in her early writings, she underestimated the importance of sympathy to success, or perhaps she did not consider lack of sympathetic support a lack of opportunity, for it was lack of sympathy that explains her not writing fiction until she was almost thirty-seven,³⁰ as it explains Maggie Tulliver and Dorothea Brooke's failure to find vocations.

But the main reason that George Eliot was not interested in persuading women to become feminists--and doubtless one reason for her refusal actively to support women's rights--was her lack of faith in most women. Never having thought well of the majority of women, morally or intellectually,³¹ she bitterly complained that women's work was often incompetent, that women often pursued work beyond their capacities. Most of "our own feminine literature," she wrote, "is made up of books which could have been better written by men."³² In "Silly Novels," she excoriated incompetent women novelists,³³ writing, in 1858, "There is something more piteous almost than soapless poverty in this application of feminine incapacity to Literature" (*Letters*, II:439). In 1868, she wrote Barbara Bodichon:

What I should like to be sure of as a result of higher education for women . . . is, their recognition of the great amount of social unproductive labour which needs to be done by women, and which is now either not done at all or done wretchedly.

No good can come to women, more than to any class of male mortals, while each aims at doing the highest kind of work which ought rather to be held in sanctity as what only the few can do well. I believe . . . that a more thorough education will tend to do away with the odious vulgarity of our notions about functions and employment, and to propagate the true gospel that the deepest disgrace is to insist on doing work for which we are unfit--to do work of any sort badly (*Letters*, IV:425).

In 1869, she writes of her imperfect sympathy for some women activists (*Letters*, V:58)--possibly the "new women," whom Eliza Linton describes³⁴ and whom Marian may have thought of portraying in Gwendolen Harleth,³⁵ women who perhaps included those she deprecated as "overzealous champions of women [who] assert . . . even their moral superiority to men."³⁶ Having written, in 1853, that "[e]nfranchisement of women' only makes creeping progress; and that is best, for woman does not yet deserve a much better lot than man gives her" (*Letters*, II:86), she was wary of giving rights to women whom she thought would abuse them.

Finally, George Eliot thought of herself as an activist, "teaching the world through books" (*Letters*, VI:405; cf. IV:301).³⁷ Passionately wanting to "'strengthen the good and mitigate the evil'" (*L*, VI:258), through her books, so as to help bring in the millennium,³⁸ she was always concerned with the influence of her works,³⁹ regarding the "many deeply affecting assurances of [*Adam Bede's*] influence for good on individual minds" as a great

blessing (*Journals*, 143), and declaring, in 1871, that the only friend she cared much to acquire was "one who takes into his own life the spiritual outcome of mine" (*L*, V:229).⁴⁰ And she was a powerful influence, as her immense fame testifies.⁴¹ Readers constantly testified to the "practical effectiveness" (*Letters*, IV:248) of her writings.⁴²

In fact, so concerned was she that her protests against women's constricted lives should issue in ameliorative action that she shrewdly seems to have tried to effect reform by appealing to men's self-interest. Emphasizing that debased women debase men ("Fuller and . . . Wollstonecraft," 989b), that ill-educated women destroy ambitious men like Lydgate, and understanding, like contemporary feminists, that women's lot is dependent on the lot men give her,⁴³ she wrote, in 1867, that "young men . . . are "just the class I care most to influence" (*Letters*, IV:397). Emily Davies reported that Mrs. Lewes, who was anxious that the first women admitted to schools of higher education should serve as advertisements of the good of educating women (*Letters*, V:406), "said she thought the great thing to be hoped for from the College was that it would modify the opinions of men about the education of women, and assert in an emphatic way that . . . it ought to be on a par with that of men."⁴⁴

Desirous of making her fiction practically effective, George Eliot thought she would more forcefully present her views by maintaining the persona of a neutral observer in her fiction. She objected to readers equating her characters' views with her personal views (*Letters*, V:239), and she would not make her ideas public, as a political activist must, in order that people not read them into her fiction. In 1859, she wrote, "I am rather morbidly averse to anything that can be mistaken as a sign of a *personal* reason for a critical judgment" (*Letters*, III:100). In 1876, expressing gratitude for an admirer's sympathy with her conceptions, but refusing permission to publish her letter to him, (*Letters*, VI:288), she explained her conviction "that her influence as an author would be injured by presenting herself outside her books," saying that, because a public person's words are misinterpreted, misquoted, etc., she, by giving occasion to frivolous comment, "should be stepping out of my proper function and acting for what I think an evil result" (*Letters*, VI:289).⁴⁵

Furthermore, even if we disregard all the caveats I have mentioned, the fact that she was a retiring woman who shrank from publicity (*L*, V:193) and hated being lionized⁴⁶ should absolve her of nonactivism motivated by antifeminism. Actually, nothing concerned her so much as love for her common-law husband⁴⁷ and for her writing, the "best part of me" (*L*, V:133, 212), "worth living and suffering for" (*L*, III:187; cf. V:244, 437; VII:230; IX:192). Extolling "the supremacy of the intellectual life" (*Middlemarch*, ch. lxxiii, p. 727), she organized her life around her work. Dedicated to it, always impatient about interruptions to it,⁴⁸ she eschewed activities that would encroach on her time for study: she paid no visits, returned no calls, refrained from dining out,⁴⁹ saw few people,⁵⁰ refused to entertain visitors for extended periods (*Letters*, III:358), and abstained from letter-writing as much as possible (*Letters*, V:122). Resenting obligations that interfered with a life "passed chiefly in study and always in domestic ease" (*Letters*, IV:473), she complained about the "time-frittering work" (*Letters*, III:364) required by the "outsides" of her life, saying that, "too weary to be of use to any one else than Pater [Lewes]," she "detest[s] doing anything" (*Letters*, IV:234, 500). Indifferent to luxury (*Letters*, III:342), and disliking pleasure if troublesome--"from eating shrimps upwards" (*Letters*, V:340; cf. III:125; IV:479)--she wanted to be free of children,⁵¹ writing, in 1866,

that she is not "very open to the pleasures which may be found in our personal share of the grand-parents' joy" (*Letters*, IV:311-12). When Mrs. Taylor enlisted Sara Hennell to canvass for women's suffrage in 1867, Marian wrote Sara, "I love and honour my friend Mrs. Taylor, but it is impossible that she can judge beforehand of the proportionate toil and interruption such labours cause to women whose habits and duties differ so much from her own" (*Letters*, IV:390). In her later years, as "acquaintances and solicitations tend[ed] to multiply" (*Letters*, IV:477), she established the Sunday open houses to economize time (*Letters*, IV:311), retreating at times to the country⁵² to secure her tête à tête with Lewes.⁵³ Moreover, often indisposed, considering health her cross,⁵⁴ limiting her knowledge of life (*Letters*, III:128; IV:473; V: 31), she did not have the energy necessary for activism. Her situation was not unlike that of Elizabeth Barrett Browning, whose knowledge also was circumscribed by bad health,⁵⁵ but critics took Browning's illnesses more seriously, excusing her lack of activism.

If readers cannot conceive of George Eliot's nonactivism except as symptomatic of antifeminism, they have only to remember that for centuries few women complained openly about the injustices they suffered from a patriarchal society. In fact, until the second wave feminism, in the 1970's, women generally maintained a conspiracy of silence, "fear[ful] of being thought unlike others," as Leonora Halm-Eberstein says (*Daniel Deronda*, ch. li, p. 586), not caring to be derided for opposing ideas that seemed, even for many women, written in stone. Only when complaint became politically correct in the latter part of the last century, long after first wave feminism a century before, did women freely vent their frustration and anger. To judge George Eliot for not doing what most women did not do until modern times--when society is no longer united in brainwashing young women to accept patriarchal views of women's function and mission⁵⁶--is unfair. Moreover, even would-be reformers in George Eliot's day were not always activists. Frances Power Cobbe, who "came closer to propounding a theory of patriarchy than did any other Victorian feminist," "was not a great feminist activist."⁵⁷

George Eliot devoted her life to what was her favorite work (*Letters*, V:40; VII:217). (In *Middlemarch*, she argues that one should pursue the work one most enjoys, that being the work for which one is most fitted.) Why should she be thought antifeminist only because she was not an activist? I am not arguing that she was a feminist. I am only arguing that implying that her lack of activism is evidence of her antifeminism only confuses a complicated issue.

After the initial reference to a work by Marian Evans (ME) or George Eliot (GE), references to the work, where appropriate, are cited in the text.

Notes

¹Kristin Brady, *George Eliot*, Women Writers (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992), 58.

²Karen Chase, "Feminist Approaches," in *Oxford Reader's Companion to George Eliot*, ed. John Rignall (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2000), 64-65; Deirdre David, *Intellectual Women and Victorian Patriarchy: Harriet Martineau, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, George Eliot* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1987), 178; Barbara Hardy, *The Novels of George Eliot: A Study in Form* (London: The Athlone Press, 1963), 52; Kathryn Hughes, *George Eliot: The Last Victorian* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1999), 55; George Levine, "Repression and Vocation in George Eliot: A Review Essay," *Women and Literature* 7

(Spring 1979): 4; Jennifer Uglow, *George Eliot* (New York: Random House, Pantheon Books; London: Virago Press, 1987), 70-71; Bonnie Zimmerman, "George Eliot and Feminism: The Case of *Daniel Deronda*," in *Nineteenth-Century Women Writers of the English-Speaking World*, ed. Rhoda B. Nathan, Contributions in Women's Studies, no. 69 (New York and London: Greenwood Press, 1986), 231.

³Nancy L. Paxton, *George Eliot and Herbert Spencer: Feminism, Evolutionism, and the Reconstruction of Gender* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1991), 10.

⁴*The George Eliot Letters*, ed. Gordon S. Haight, 9 vols. (Vols. 1-7--New Haven: Yale Univ. Press; London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1954-55; Vols. 8-9--New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1978), III:227; cf. 23, 34. Henceforth, this work is abbreviated "*Letters*."

⁵Though she wrote in 1849 that "the active is worth twice of the passive all the world over" (*Letters*, I:325), regarding "that life of practically energetic sentiment" as the best life (GE, *Daniel Deronda*, ed. Graham Handley, Clarendon Edition (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), ch. xxxii, p. 337), she was drawn to passivity, calling herself "Lady Theory" (*Letters*, V:104), who feels and talks but does little (*Letters*, IV:124). In 1872, she wrote, "I easily sink into mere absorption of what other minds have done, and should like a whole life for that alone" (*Letters*, V:324-25; cf. II:383).

⁶Herbert Spencer, who said that she frequently expressed difference of opinion "in a half apologetic manner," wrote that she desired "to feel at one with society around. . . . her natural feeling was a longing to agree as far as possible" ("A More Active Year," in *An Autobiography*, 2 vols. [London: Williams and Norgate, 1904], I:398, 396).

⁷*Letters of George Henry Lewes*, ed. William Baker, 3 vols., English Literary Studies Monograph series, nos. 64, 65, and 79 (Victoria, B. C.: Univ. of Victoria, 1995, 1999), III:118.

⁸Cf. *Letters*, VI:287; GE, "Address to Working Men, by Felix Holt," *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* 103 (Jan. 1868): 1-11; GE, *Felix Holt*, ed. Fred C. Thomson, Clarendon Edition (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), ch. xvi, pp. 157-58; GE, *Middlemarch*, ed. David Carroll, Clarendon Edition (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), ch. xlvi, p. 457; J[ohn] W[alter], Cross, ed. *George Eliot's Life As Related in Her Letters and Journals*, 3 vols. (Edinburgh and London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1885), ch. xix, III:426-27; [W. M. W. Call], "George Eliot: Her Life and Writings," *Westminster Review* 116 (July 1, 1881): 191.

⁹[Call], "George Eliot," 185. Lewes wrote Blackwood, in 1856, that a story of his, "is *not* to be in any way political or social. . . . No one is more ignorant of politics, or more indifferent to them. I feel quite inclined to accept the Chinese synonym [*sic*], who calls talking politics 'talking some idle words.' I *never* write politics" (*Letters of . . . Lewes*, I:245).

¹⁰William Hale White, who, like ME, lived at Chapman's from 1851 to 1853, wrote that she lived an "entirely unconventional life" (Letter, in "Literary Gossip," *Athenaeum*, no. 3031 [Nov. 28, 1885]: 702b).

¹¹Sara A. Burstall, *Retrospect and Prospect: Sixty Years of Women's Education* (London and New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1933), 77-78.

¹²See Ray Strachey, *"The Cause": A Short History of the Women's Movement in Great Britain* (London: G. Bell and Sons, 1928), ch. viii, p. 147; Sheila R. Herstein, *Mid-Victorian Feminist, Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon* (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 1985), 84-85. Moreover, GE was often considered coarse; see *The Amberley Papers: Bertrand Russell's Family Background*, ed. Bertrand Russell and Patricia Russell, 2 vols. (New York: Simon and Schuster; London: George Allen & Unwin, 1966), II:58. George

Eliot's novels were forbidden reading for many young girls (Gordon S. Haight, Introduction to *The Mill on the Floss*, ed. Haight, Riverside Edition [Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1961], xx-xxi; Robert McAlmon, *Being Geniuses Together, 1920-1930*, revised by Kay Boyle [Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday & Co., 1968], 82).

¹³Herstein, *Mid-Victorian Feminist*, 192.

¹⁴Evelyn Abbott and Lewis Campbell, *The Life and Letters of Benjamin Jowett*, 2 vols. (London: John Murray, 1897), II:182; cf. II:274.

¹⁵*Letters*, I:104-5, 119, 277; II:396; III:177, 467; IV:159; V:122; *The Journals of George Eliot*, ed. Margaret Harris and Judith Johnston (Cambridge: Univ. Press, 1998), 90, 125, 127, 138; ME, "Modern German Music," *Leader* 5 (April 29, 1854): 403b (attributed to ME [*Letters*, II:150 n. 6]); *Daniel Deronda*, ch. xxiii, pp. 236-40. Emphasizing perseverance, "the passionate patience of genius" (*Daniel Deronda*, ch. xli, p. 478)--a quotation attributed to Georges Louis Leclerc de Buffon (Matthew Arnold, "Joubert," in *Matthew Arnold's "Essays in Criticism, First Series": A Critical Edition*, ed. Thomas Marion Hoctor [Chicago and London: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1968], 170)--she wrote to Emanuel Deutsch, in 1868 (date in William Baker, *George Eliot and Judaism*, Salzburg Studies in English Literature, Romantic Reassessment, no. 45 [Salzburg: Institut für Englische Sprache und Literatur, Universität Salzburg, 1975], 132 n. 26), that "our good is to be got by weary struggle, & by that alone," (*Catalogue of the Archer M. Huntington Collection of American and European Autograph Letters, Manuscripts, Documents and Music*, Property of The American Academy of Arts and Letters, for sale by auction by Sotheby and Co., Nov. 12, 1963, p. 22, lot 45). In GE, *Romola*, ed. Andrew Brown, Clarendon Edition (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), ch. xii, p. 121, Bardo praises Tito for his "labor, without which," he says, "life has given nothing to mortals. It is too often the 'palma sine pulvere'. . . that young ambition covets." The quotation is also in GE's Bodleian Library Notebook (MS. DON. G. 8), ed. Andrew Thompson, in *George Eliot--George Henry Lewes Studies*, nos. 50-51 (Sept. 2006): 7 [3:1].

¹⁶See *Journals*, 90.

¹⁷Chase, s.v. "the woman question," *Oxford Reader's Companion*, 448.

¹⁸GE always attributed her success to Lewes. See the inscriptions to him in her works; Edith Simcox, "George Eliot," *Nineteenth Century* 9 (May 1881): 783; Abbott and Campbell, *Benjamin Jowett*, II:182.

¹⁹GE's stories of Jubal, Armgart, Arion, and Leonora Halm-Eberstein argue that the price of fame is death. See also *Letters*, V:212; VI:415; VIII:383.

²⁰Cross, *George Eliot's Life*, Introductory, I:36-37.

²¹ME, "Art and Belles Lettres," *Westminster Review* 65 (April 1856): 643.

²²"Belles Lettres," *Westminster Review* 66 (Oct. 1856): 576, 578.

²³"Recollections by Kate Field," *New York Daily Tribune*, Dec. 24, 1880, p. 5b.

²⁴Cross, *George Eliot's Life*, ch. xix, III:430.

²⁵Virginia Woolf, "George Eliot," in *The Common Reader, First Series*, ed. Andrew McNeillie (New York and London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1984), 172. This quotation is absent from the original publication of the article (*Times Literary Supplement*, Nov. 20, 1919, pp. 657b-58b), from which the editor purportedly reprinted the article (*Common Reader*, 256).

²⁶Cross, *George Eliot's Life*, ch. xix, III:430.

²⁷Edith Simcox, *Monument to the Memory of George Eliot: Edith J. Simcox's "Autobiography of a*

Shirtmaker," ed. Constance M. Fulmer and Margaret E. Barfield, *Literature and Society in Victorian Britain*, Garland Reference Library of the Humanities (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1998), 23.

²⁸*Letters*, III:242; IV:269; V:406; VIII:402-3; ME, "Woman in France: Madame de Sablé," *Westminster Review* 62 (Oct. 1854): 450-51; *Romola*, v, 51; vi, 68; *Middlemarch*, ch. lxiv, p. 636.

²⁹ME, "Woman in France," 449-51.

³⁰In 1859, she wrote a friend, "Under the influence of the intense happiness I have enjoyed in my married life from thorough moral and intellectual sympathy, I have at last found out my true vocation" (*Letters*, III:186).

³¹*Letters*, II:157, 454; V:468; VI:287.

³²ME, "Woman in France," 448.

³³ME, "Silly Novels by Lady Novelists," *Westminster Review* 66 (Oct. 1856): 442-61.

³⁴[Eliza Lynn Linton], "The Girl of the Period," *The Saturday Review* 25 (March 14, 1868): 339-40. See also articles on the subject in *Saturday Review* following in 1868-69.

³⁵Bonnie Zimmerman, "Gwendolen Harleth and 'The Girl of the Period,'" in *George Eliot: Centenary Essays and an Unpublished Fragment*, ed. Anne Smith (London: Vision Press, 1980), 196-217. Mathilde Blind says that GE once remarked that she wished to draw a girl of the period in Gwendolen (*George Eliot*, Eminent Women Series [London: W. H. Allen and Co., 1883], ch. xiv, p. 198). In GE, *Impressions of Theophrastus Such*, Cabinet Edition (Edinburgh and London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1880), ch. x, p. 153, GE describes a type that fits Linton's description of the "new woman."

³⁶ME, "Margaret Fuller and Mary Wollstonecraft," *Leader* 6 (Oct. 13, 1855): 989b.

³⁷Edith Simcox says GE urged her to say "that every writer was *ipso facto* a teacher,--an educational influence--on his readers" (*Monument*, 22).

³⁸She had faith that "the inevitable march of the human race," "the grander evolution of things to which all social forms are but temporarily subservient," "the groaning and travailing of the world towards the birth of the right and fair" (ME, "The Natural History of German Life," *Westminster Review* 66 (July 1856): 71, 79; *Letters*, V:390), were conspiring to bring about the millennium.

³⁹*Letters*, V:245, 357; VI:52, 258; VII:284; *Journals*, 142-43; see also *Letters*, IV:466; VII:250.

⁴⁰In *Daniel Deronda*, Mordecai cultivates Deronda as one who will take the spiritual outcome of Mordecai's life.

⁴¹Alexander Main's letters to the Leweses (National Library of Scotland) constantly reveal his idolatry of her, shared by Charles Ritter (letter of Main to GE, Feb. 29, 1876, p. 203a). See also *Letters*, V:276, 415; VII:16.

⁴²See *Letters*, III:17-18, 169-70 n. 5; V:387. Having written, in 1861, that she "should be unable to write at all without strong proofs that I had touched [people]" (*Letters*, III:393), she wrote, in 1873, "I have received many deeply affecting assurances of [*Middlemarch's*] influence for good on individual minds" (*Journals*, 143). An historian, regarding the Jewish element in *Daniel Deronda*, says that "in terms of its practical effects it was probably the most influential novel of the nineteenth century" (Paul Johnson, *A History of the Jews* (New York and London: Harper and Row, 1987), 378. I am indebted to the late Professor Brian F. Wilkie for this information.

⁴³Esther Lyon says that a woman "is dependent on what happens to her" (*Felix Holt*, ch. xxvii, p. 225; cf. ch. xliii, p. 342); Mrs. Transome, that "I must put up with all things as they are

determined for me" (*Felix Holt*, ch. xxxvi, p. 294). Cf. *Middlemarch*, ch. xxv, p. 252; *Daniel Deronda*, ch. xiii, pp. 119-20. John Stuart Mill wrote, "Women cannot be expected to devote themselves to the emancipation of women, until men in considerable number are prepared to join with them in the undertaking" (*The Subjection of Women*, ch. iii, in *Essays on Equality, Law, and Education*, ed. J. M. Robson; Vol. XXI of *Collected Works of John Stuart Mill* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press; London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984), 322.

⁴⁴Barbara Stephen, *Emily Davies and Girton College* (London: Constable and Co., 1927), 196.

⁴⁵See also *Letters*, II:509; III:109, 465; V:75, 76; IX:353, s.v., 300:5.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, IV:346; V:84, 86, 94, 144.

⁴⁷See *ibid.*, IV:417; VIII:456.

⁴⁸*Ibid.*, IV:389; V:382, 454; VI:3; *Letters of . . . Lewes*, II:78.

⁴⁹*Letters*, III:397-98; IV:360, 477, 489; V:336, 393; *Letters of . . . Lewes*, III:53.

⁵⁰*Letters*, I:99; III:436; IV:177, 277, 279; VI:83; VII:62.

⁵¹*Ibid.*, III:407, 460; IV:75, 94, 117, 127, 135, 161, 177; Simcox, *Monument*, 81-82, 86.

⁵²*Letters*, V:249-50, 259, 271, 393, 454; VI:428; IX:134.

⁵³*Ibid.*, IV:177, 493; VI:83; VII:62.

⁵⁴*Ibid.*, II:52, 198, 211; III:71; IV:198; V:122, 361, 371, 446; VI:310; *Letters of . . . Lewes*, III:71.

⁵⁵Elizabeth Browning to Robert Browning, March 20, 1845, in Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett, *Letters of Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett, 1845-1846*, ed. Elvan Kintner, 2 vols. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, Belknap Press, 1969), I:41.

⁵⁶See Britta Zangen, *Our Daughters Must Be Wives: Marriageable Young Women in the Novels of Dickens, Eliot, and Hardy*, *Feministische Forschungen* (Frankfurt am Main and London: Peter Lang, 2004), 25-79; and Florence Nightingale, "Cassandra," in Strachey, "Cause," App. 1, pp. 395-418.

⁵⁷Barbara Caine, *Victorian Feminists* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1992), 104.